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Letter from Mozambique

Ronan White CSSp

Dear Readers of *Spiritan*,

Greetings from Mozambique where it is lovely and cool at the moment. I hope that all is well with you there in Canada. Here we are fine although it seems that the cooler weather is making us all a bit indisposed. I am down with a bit of malaria at the moment, while my companion Fr. Alberto Tehindemba CSSp is not feeling so well either.

The money you sent to us was used to support a farmer's association in buying, among other items, two bullocks and a plough. A cart is being constructed at the moment by local welders. The bullocks were bought two weeks ago and were delivered to the association's farm on the 12th of June. It was a long and exhausting day; everything that could possibly have gone wrong went wrong.

The transport for the cattle, which was meant to arrive at 6 am did not arrive until 11 am. When the two bullocks were loaded onto the truck, they simply leaped over the side of it! It turned out that the wooden bars meant to keep the cattle in were only kept together by string! We told the driver to go and get the job done properly but he started complaining that he didn't have the money to buy nails, nor petrol to get us to our destination, nor lunch!

So we had to go back to the transport company, order the director to give the driver money for both petrol and construction of the bars. We left it to him to beg for his lunch money! We got back to the cattle at 2 pm to find the driver and some others chopping trees in a nearby forest. They then used the wood to build up the sides of the truck.

The job was finally finished at about 3:30 pm and then we had to go back out to the herd and find the two head of cattle we had bought. Once again the bullocks panicked when loaded onto the truck. They jumped over the side, completely destroying all the woodwork in the process. We had to rebuild the sides of the truck, round up the cattle again and finally got them safely on board at about 5 pm. We then had to set off on the two hour drive, on dreadful roads and tracks, to a place called Tchiiane.

The members of the group, especially the women, were very uneasy about going at this late hour. Our original plan had been to leave at 6:30 in the morning, get there at 8:30, unload the cattle and be back home by lunch time. I was quite uneasy about it myself as it is not a great idea to travel in the dark here. However, the thought of repeating the entire process and facing the same dilemma the following day was too disturbing so, with the support of a few others, I insisted that we push on.

All was going well on the journey until we came across the Rio de Feiticos ("the River of Magic Spells"). Of course the truck broke down in the river and we all had to get out to push it. The people with us were extremely reluctant to

be getting out of the safety of the truck anywhere near the River of Spells, not to mind in the middle of it, in the pitch darkness of night. We managed to push the truck out of the river and it struggled, spluttering and stopping and starting for the rest of the journey until we finally arrived in Tchiiane. The two hour journey took us over four hours.

It was completely dark, with only a tiny amount of moon to help us, but we managed to unload the animals without too much difficulty and found our way to a hut where some of the farmers' association members had gathered earlier in the day in anticipation of our arrival. They had some badly needed food cooking on a fire and a few buckets of local beer.

Then the party began. The women started dancing, the men started singing and everyone started downing the local brew. The joy that the arrival of the cattle had brought was clearly written across the face and heard in the voice of everyone there that night. They danced and sang and thanked God for the gift they had received. It was a wonderful night spent around a fire under the glimmering African sky, a night that will stay with me for the rest of my life. We didn't get back to Nampula until late the following morning.

At the moment the animals are being trained and most of the members of the association are there in Tchiiane participating in the training, learning how to treat and work the animals. Training should take a further 20 days and the cart should be built by the end of the week. So we hope that by next month, the beasts will be in operation both ploughing the land and drawing cart loads of products from the farm to the markets in Nampula.

Once the cart has been paid for and a few of the remaining costs covered, I will send you a proper report of the entire project. But for the moment I just wanted to keep you informed and let you know how happy and thankful the members of the farming cooperative called 'AJUDENA' are for the gift of \$3,000 US from their supporters in Canada. The two bullocks, plough and cart will make a huge difference in the lives of the people in Tchiiane. ■

July 1, 2007



Stubborn and tired, refusing to move onto truck.



Ronan, 10 pm, with the bullocks unloaded in Tchiiane.



Happy members of AJUDENA in Tchiiane.